

James Cant Ranch
Dayville vic.
Grant County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-142

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12-DAY.V;
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REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

ADDENDUM
FILE 10.

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

Addendum To
Cant Ranch
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument
East side of State Route 19, north of US 26
Grant County
Oregon

HABS No. OR-142

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12-DAY, V,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historical American Building Survey
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HABS
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12- DAY, V,
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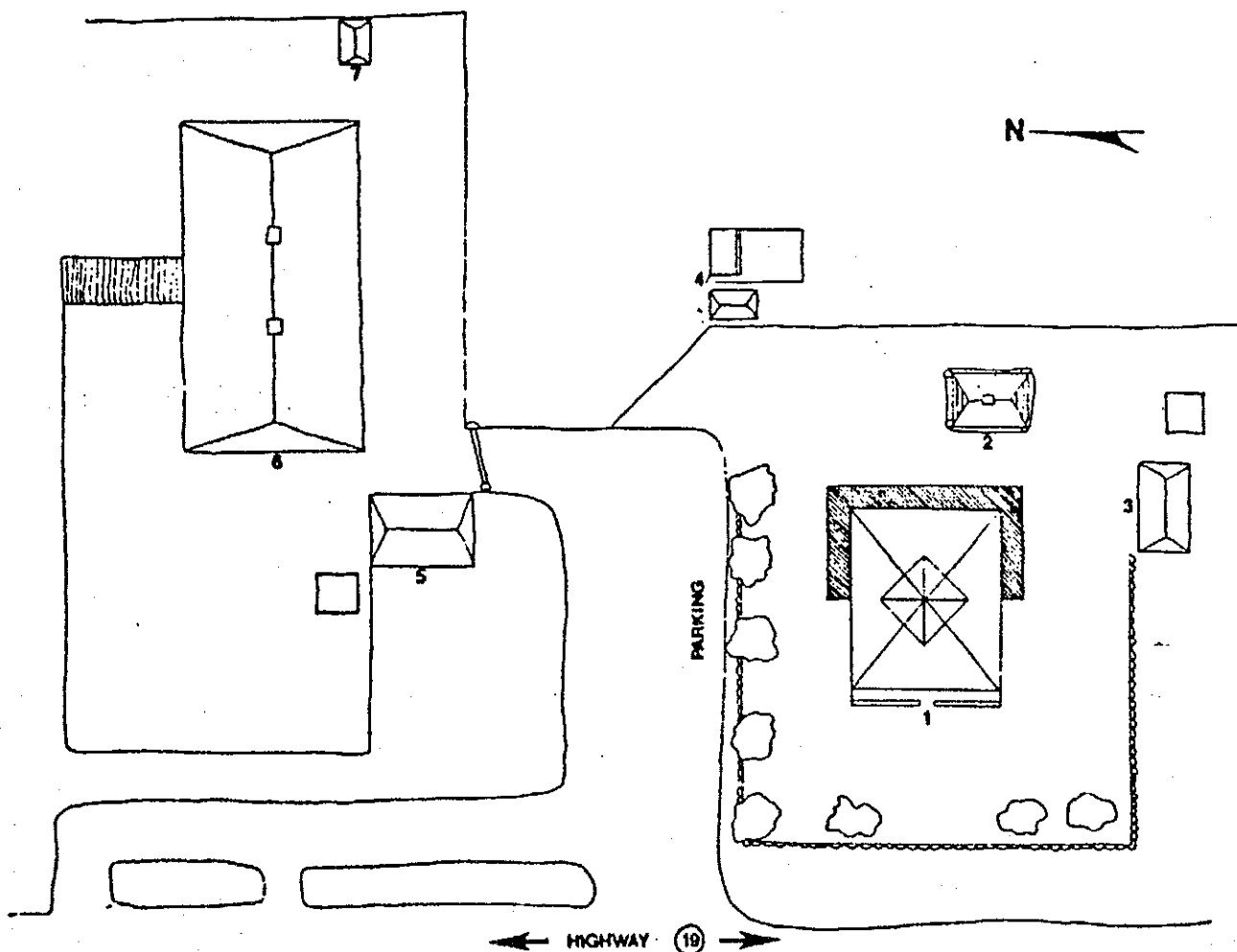
HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
SKETCH MAP

Addendum To
Cant Ranch
East Side of State Route 19
John Day Fossil Beds National Monument
Grant County
Oregon

JAMES CANT RANCH
HABS NO. OR-142 (Page 1)

KEY

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Main Ranch House | 5. Workshop
(small shed--outbuilding #2--
is northwest of shop) |
| 2. Log Cabin | 6. Barn with Sheepshearing Pens |
| 3. Bunkhouse
(Privy is southeast of
bunkhouse) | 7. Watchman's Hut |
| 4. Feed Storage Shed and
Chicken Coop | |
- Note: sheepholding pens are
northwest of barn



HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
JAMES CANT RANCH

Location East side of Oregon Route 19, Dayville (Grant County), John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Oregon.

U.S.G.S. (15') Picture Gorge, Oregon Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:

A: 11/291000/4936700
B: 11/291250/4936475
C: 11/291300/4935650
D: 11/291-700/4933850
E: 11/291750/4933250
F: 11/290800/4934850
G: 11/290600/4936800

Present owner: U. S. Department of The Interior
National Park Service

Present use: Exhibit and Office Space

Significance: The James Cant Ranch is significant on a local level for its association with exploration/settlement and agriculture. The Cant Ranch has been a local landmark in the John Day River Valley of Eastern Oregon since the construction of its imposing main house was completed circa 1918. Nestled below Sheep Rock along the John Day River just north of Picture Gorge, the ranch is one of the most intact remaining examples of early 20th century ranching operations in the valley. The land was first homesteaded by Floyd Officer, a member of one of the first families to settle in the John Day River Valley. After purchasing the land, the Cant family used Officer's cabin, which still stands today. The Sheep Rock Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, in which the ranch is located, incorporates the initial 357 acres purchased from Officer by James Cant, Sr., in 1910. In addition to the main house, the ranch complex includes the barn, sheepshearing stalls (among the best preserved of their type still known to exist in the region), watchman's hut, bunkhouse, and six other outbuildings. James Cant, Sr., a Scottish immigrant, became one of the more prominent ranchers in the valley. The ranch remained in the Cant family until it was purchased by the National Park Service in 1975, three years after Cant's death at age 92. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in June 21, 1984.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Historical Context

The Cant Ranch has been a local landmark in the John Day River Valley of Eastern Oregon since the construction of its imposing main house was completed circa 1918. The complex is one of the best preserved and intact examples of early 20th-century ranching operations in the valley. In addition to the main house, the ranch includes a barn, sheepshearing stalls, watchman's hut, bunkhouse and an assortment of outbuildings.

The Cant Ranch was built on land first homesteaded by Floyd Officer, a member of one of the first families to settle in the John Day River Valley. Officer moved to his claim from the Dayville area (about 5 miles to the east) circa 1881. The small log cabin still standing behind the main house is the only structure known to remain from the Officer homestead. Officer's daughter recalls that the cabin was used for storage and that the family lived in a larger log house that stood southwest of the cabin. The log house was taken down by the Cant family circa 1919 following the construction of the present main house.

Floyd Officer sold his homestead to James Cant, Sr. and Johnny Mason in 1910 for \$4,000. Cant, who arrived in eastern Oregon in 1905, was part of a wave of Scottish immigrants who settled in the John Day River Valley at the turn-of-the-century. Many got their start by working for other already-established ranchers, usually fellow Scots. Cant was hired by Alexander Murray, who had one of the larger ranches in the area and was known in the community for his efforts in bringing his countrymen to the States. Cant worked for Murray from 1905-1910, taking as his wages 50 percent of the lamb crop in order to build his own band.

Cant came to the States experienced in dealing with stock operations. His parents owned a butcher shop and stockyard in Scotland, and he had worked for several years, beginning in 1900, for a Scottish stock firm, travelling to Portugal and Argentina to purchase merino bucks. He had also briefly been in business for himself in Argentina, raising mules for military use during the Boer War.

Cant's future wife, Elizabeth Grant, also immigrated to Oregon from Scotland, arriving in 1907. Married in 1908, the Cants both continued to work on the Murray Ranch--she as a cook--for 2 more years. When they were ready to set up their own operation, they purchased the Officer homestead and moved into the log house on the property with their first-born son, James Cant, Jr.

James Cant Sr. became one of the more prominent and successful ranchers in the valley. Over the next six decades, the Cant operation expanded ten-fold. A 1965 article in the Western Livestock Journal reported that

the ranch consisted of 6500 acres of deeded land plus 4500 acres leased from the Bureau of Land Management; another 600 acres within the Thomas Condon Fossil Beds had recently been sold to the State of Oregon for a park. During the peak of the sheep operation, Cant pastured bands on leased mountain ranges in Oregon's Malheur National Forest. Many thousands more sheep from neighboring ranches annually came through the shearing pens. Along with many of their neighbors, the Cants switched to a cattle operation in the mid-forties. Low wool prices and the difficulty of locating good herders had made sheep ranching increasingly unprofitable. The Journal reported in 1965 that the Cant Ranch was producing 500-600 head of cattle annually.

The Cants were prominent members of the valley community. James Cant, Sr., was a member, often a founder, of numerous community organizations and business associations, including the Oregon Wool Growers' Association; the Grant County Stockgrowers' Association; the Patrons of Husbandry, Grange No. 627; and the Cattle and Horse Raisers' Association of Oregon; and served as District Clerk for the local school district. He and his family were noted for their hospitality. Travelers through the valley were welcomed and given a meal and, when needed, a bed. When Oregon Route 19 was constructed, Mrs. Cant boarded the road crews. Family members recall that the need to accommodate the frequent travelers and houseguests was one of the reasons Cant built such a large house. With seven bedrooms, each large enough to accommodate two beds, he was confident that his family would not have to give up their beds when guests arrived.

The upper basin area's first school was started at the Cant Ranch in 1919. Classes were first held in the old log house; shortly afterwards, when the Cants decided to tear that house down, the school was moved to the third floor of the new house. School was taught by a young woman from Kentucky whose aunt was the wife of one of the neighboring ranchers; she boarded with the Cants and, several years later, married Cant's cousin.

The third floor of the Cant house and the grounds of the ranch, were the scene of many social gatherings for the Scottish community. Bagpipes and kilts were often brought out for these occasions and the thick Scottish accents that many of the original settlers never lost are recalled by surviving participants.

The ranch remained in the Cant family until it was purchased by the National Park Service in 1975, three years after Cant's death at age 92. The ranch is now part of the Sheep Rock Unit of John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The monument was established by Congress in 1974 to preserve one of the nation's most important deposits of mammalian fossils--a unique uninterrupted seven million-year fossil record. The State of Oregon began purchasing land in the vicinity in the 1930s to preserve these deposits through the establishment of State Parks; one of these purchases was the above-mentioned 600 acres acquired from the Cants. Sections of these State lands were incorporated within the National Monument. Today, the ranch headquarters serves as a visitor center, offering exhibits on geology and local ranching history.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. Site

The Cant Ranch is situated along the bottomlands of the natural basin formed by the John Day River, an area which has traditionally been called Turtle Cove. The ranch's irrigated fields extend approximately 2-1/4 miles north from the exit of Picture Gorge, varying in width from a few feet to a couple hundred yards. Rising steeply to the east and the west from the edge of these fields are the basalt escarpments that define the basin. Beyond these escarpments are elements of the Blue Mountain Range that rings the basin. The most dramatic local prominence is Sheep Rock, which rises to 3360' directly southeast of the ranch buildings. The greenbelt formed by the ranch's irrigated fields distinctly contrasts with the dusty colors and sparse vegetation of the surrounding hills.

The ranch complex is situated on the west bank of the John Day River. With the exception of the main house and the log cabin all of the structures on the ranch date from ca. 1920. At one time a 14-structure complex, the site now includes 11 buildings: ranch house, barn and sheepshearing stalls, cabin, bunkhouse, privy, chicken coops, feed storage shed, workshop, shed, sheep pens, and a watchman's hut. The cabin, a small, one-room, one-story log structure originally built over a dirt-wall cellar, is the oldest building in the group. Dating from the Officer homestead period (c. 1881-1910), it was used by the Cant family primarily for storage of supplies and foodstuffs. Pack horses were tied up outside of it to be loaded with supplies for the shepherders. Some time after 1976 a garage (NW of the house), an oil storage building (NE of the house), and a small outbuilding (south of the watchman's hut) were removed from the site.

Distinctive landscape features of the ranch complex include a pair of hinged wire gates flanked by a pair of square rubble stone posts with pyramid-shaped tops; a series of concrete sidewalks leading to and from the main residence; a lush green lawn surrounding the house; pollarded trees and ornamental plantings, and wood post and rail, and wire and wood fences throughout the site. The main house and its associated landscape features exhibit a strong sense of enclosure which sets it apart from other operations of the ranch. The lawn, plantings and paths create and define a residential zone clearly distinct from the "working" or agricultural zone of the ranch.

At the present time the house is used as a visitor facility, with exhibits on the first floor, offices on the second, and storage on the third. The National Park Service has actively taken steps to stabilize and preserve the key buildings. The main house, bunkhouse, cabin, feed storage shed and workshop are all in good to excellent condition. The cabin was stabilized and rehabilitated in 1983, requiring the addition of partial concrete footings. These footings are visible only from inside the

cellar. The barn and sheep shearing stalls, chicken coop, shed and watchman's hut are in fair to good condition; the National Park Service has undertaken internal stabilization measures in the barn in recent years (ca. 1985). Further study of the barn is planned to determine what steps will be necessary to ensure its future structural stability and its suitability for adaptive re-use.

B. Physical History

(See HABS No. OR-142-A for house file.)

Construction on the Cant Ranch began during the Officer homestead period from which the log cabin remains. The original Officer log dwelling was replaced c. 1919 by the present main house, which was completed c. 1918. No architect was employed to design or build the house or its associated outbuildings. However, Cant family sources maintain that the house plan was based on a design from The Radford American Homes, an architectural pattern book containing over 100 designs that was published in 1903 by the Radford Architectural Company of Chicago, Illinois. A review of the copy of the book still in family hands suggests that the Cants and their carpenters--Andrew Cress and Clarence Bisbee--may have taken ideas from several plans (for example, Nos. 126, 142 and 560), combining them to arrive at the final design for the ranch house.

The house is an imposing 2-1/2-story, wood-frame, hip-roofed structure, 3 bays wide with 3 hip-roofed dormers. Sitting on a concrete perimeter foundation, the house is nearly square in shape, measuring 40' 4" wide by 45' long. A front porch runs the full width of the main facade (west elevation); the roof of this porch supports a 2nd floor deck with a turned balustrade running the full width of the elevation. In addition, a porch wraps around 3 elevations (north, east, south) and is enclosed by screen. Windows are one-over-one double-hung sash with plain trim. Three-sided bay windows are found on both the north and south facades on the first floor. The roof is asphalt shingles over wood shingles. Exterior surface cladding is horizontal, bevelled wood siding (Pattern #105 in Architectural Graphics Standards Edition #5). The main door features an etched frosted glass pane depicting a young girl holding a lamb.

The original plan of the house incorporates a stairhall running west to east, a living room, dining room, kitchen, parlor, bedroom, washroom and office on the first floor; six bedrooms and a bath on the second floor; and a large open room comprises the third (attic) floor. Walls in the house have horizontal 12" boards which were finished with a cloth backing covered with wallpaper. Ceilings were the same as the walls; Trim throughout is fir.

Alterations to the main ranch house are few. In the 1930s the Cant's enclosed a second story porch on the main elevation (west). The hip roofline was repeated and multi-paned windows were used, running the full width of the elevation, to create a sun room effect. This addition was removed by the National Park Service after March 1976.

In 1979 the NPS reshingled the roof of the house with asphalt shingles, painted the exterior, and completed minor porch repairs. Interior changes are also few and are not evident from the outside of the building. First floor changes include: the conversion of a ranch office and washroom into public restrooms (1979); and new sheetrock over existing wall surfaces to meet exhibit requirements. All lighting and millwork is intact. The second floor alterations include: panelling over original wall surfaces; and the remodelling of a rear bedroom into a small kitchen for the park staff. The third floor remains intact but there is evidence of water damage in that area.

(See HABS No. OR-142-B for barn file.)

North of the main house is the 1-story barn, built ca. 1920 of timber frame construction, the barn is rectangular in shape, approximately 66' by 120'. It sits on a foundation of wood posts and stones. The barn has a wood-shingled gable roof with two gable roof ridge vents. It is clad in vertical board and batten and plain board siding. Small square multi-paned windows are found on the north and south elevations, providing the interior with light and ventilation. The 12-bay interior encloses a series of holding pens and stalls. Attached to the north elevation is a one story, rectangular (20' x 60'), open-air structure. This structure is divided into stalls for sheep shearing. Sections of the shearing equipment are still in place. Additional wood-frame sheep pens northwest of the barn are in a deteriorated condition. These lean-to type structures have shed roofs and are approximately 6' x 8' in dimension. Exterior siding consists of vertical board and batten siding and wooden slats for the roof.

Southeast of the barn is a small, crudely-built one room, wood-frame structure that housed sheepherders during lambing season, known as the watchman's hut. The building has a new wood shingled gable roof (1980) and vertical board and batten siding. It is 6' 6" x 12' 1" in size. Southwest of the barn is the workshop and a small storage shed (outbuilding #2). The workshop is a one-room, one-story wood-frame building approximately 19' x 33' and clad in horizontal bevelled wood siding. The gable roof was covered with a corrugated metal roof until the NPS replaced it with wood shingles (post 1976). The NPS has rehabilitated the workshop for use as a park maintenance facility (1978). A smaller, wood-frame, gable-roofed building addition was still attached to the workshop's south elevation in 1976, but was removed during the remodelling. The small storage shed (outbuilding #2) is a one-room wood-frame structure with a shed roof. It is square (6' x 6'), sided in vertical board and battens, and has a wood-shingled roof.

South of the barn and northeast of the main ranch house are the feed storage shed and the chicken coop. The shed is a one room, rectangular (7' x 12') wood-frame structure of horizontal board and batten siding. The gable roof was covered with corrugated metal until the National Park Service rehabilitated the structure and replaced it with wood shingles (1981-82). This building is generally thought to have been moved here from its original location south of the main house, although no written documentation confirms this. The chicken coop is also a one room, wood-frame rectangular (4' x 15' 6") structure. The corrugated metal shed roof was replaced with wood shingles by the NPS in 1982. Both of these structures are actively used. The feed shed is used to store maintenance equipment and chickens occupy the coop.

East of the house is a log cabin, believed to have been built elsewhere, floated down the John Day River, and placed on its present site in 1900. It is a one-room, one-story log structure approximately 12' 4" x 16' 10" in size, with vertical board and battens infilling the gable ends. The original wood-shingled gable roof is covered with sheets of corrugated metal. A metal stovepipe extends from the west elevation of the cabin. In 1983 the National Park Service stabilized the foundation and replaced deteriorated logs and chinking.

Southeast of the house is a bunkhouse and a privy. The bunkhouse is a one-room, one-story wood-frame building with a wood-shingled gable roof. It is sided with horizontal bevelled drop siding and has plain corner boards and door and window trim. Interior features were few originally: the ceiling had wood slats covered with cardboard; the walls were horizontal tongue and groove boards covered with wallpaper; and the flooring was linoleum tile over wood. The National Park Service adaptively rehabilitated this building in 1981-2 for use as exhibit space. This work required the replacement of the roof; raising the structure off the ground and placing it on wood sills and concealed cement blocks; and the installation of a new ceiling, floors and walls using rough-sawn lumber salvaged from neighboring structures. The privy is a small, one room, wood-frame, shed-roofed rectangular structure, 6' x 4' in dimension. The exterior siding is vertical board and batten. This is one of the few buildings that has not received a new roof.

The ranch's irrigated fields were sited on the east side of the river, across from the main complex, and were reached by two small, hand-operated cable cars erected by the Cant family. The closest is approximately 1/4 mile south of the main house; the other is another mile to the south. Only the cable car closest to the house is still operable. Northeast of the ranch on the east bank is a small, one-story, wood frame structure with vertical board siding known as Christina's cabin. The history of the cabin is somewhat obscure, but it may have been originally built to establish a homestead claim for Cant's oldest daughter. It is now in deteriorated condition.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

1. History Files for John Day Fossil Beds National Monnument, Cultural Resources Division, National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Region, Seattle.
2. List of Classified Structures nomination forms, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Oregon. National Park Service, 1976 (updated 1984).
3. Toothman, Stephanie. "James Cant Ranch Historic District" National Register of Historic Places nomination. National Park Service, Seattle, 1983.

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